

Message Text

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SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS OF LABOR'S DAY OF PROTEST

REF: OTTAWA 4121, 4137

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. FIRST NATION-WIDE POLITICAL STRIKE CONDUCTED OCTOBER 14 UNDER CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS (CLC) AUSPICES TO PROTEST AGAINST ANTI-INFLATION PROGRAM AND TO DRAMATIZE ITS STRENGTH AS EXCLUSIVE LABOR SPOKESMAN IN DEALINGS WITH FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WAS FAIRLY SUCCESSFUL IN TERMS OF MEMBERSHIP PARTICIPATION. BUT IT LACKED SUFFICIENT IMPACT TO CAUSE GOC TO ALTER ITS POLICIES ON WAGE AND PRICE CONTROLS OR TO ACCEPT CLC'S PROPOSAL FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF STATUTORY TRIPARTITE BODY WITH EXTENSIVE POWERS IN PLANNING AND DIRECTING CANADIAN ECONOMY. NEVERTHELESS, CLC HAS REAFFIRMED AND PROBABLY STRENGTHENED ITS POSITION AS LABOR'S SPOKESMAN IN CONSULTATIONS WITH GOC ON VARIOUS SOCIO ECONOMIC ISSUES THAT GOVERNMENT IS ALSO ANXIOUS TO INITIATE. END SUMMARY.

2. ASSESSMENT BY CLC LEADERSHIP WILL HAVE TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THAT, NOTWITHSTANDING ALMOST UNANIMOUS APPROVAL FOR
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DAY OF PROTEST BY ITS MAY CONVENTION AND RAFFIRMATION

DAY OF PROTEST BY ITS MAY CONVENTION AND REAFFIRMATION BY ITS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL IN MID-AUGUST, ONLY ABOUT HALF OF CLC'S 2.2 MILLION MEMBERS HEEDED STRIKE CALL. THERE WAS VIRTUALLY NO PARTICIPATION BY NON-LABOR GROUPS ALTHOUGH PROTEST PLANNERS EXERTED EFFORTS AIMED AT STUDENT AND PENSIONER PARTICIPATION. SHARP DIVISIONS WITHIN CLC AFFILIATED UNIONS AND SIGNIFICANT WORKER APATHY WERE QUITE APPARENT. UNIONS REPRESENTING MANUAL WORKERS IN MANUFACTURING, EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES, CHEMICALS, FOREST PRODUCTS AND TEXTILES, WITH UAW AND STEELWORKERS IN THE LEAD, WENT ON STRIKE IN OVERWHELMING NUMBERS. CONSTRUCTION, URBAN TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND UTILITIES LAGGED BEHIND. PREDOMINANTLY WHITE COLLAR UNIONS REPRESENTING MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES (CUPE WAS AMONG THE MOST MILITANT UNIONS PUSHING FOR GENERAL STRIKE), PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL CIVIL SERVANTS (LATTER VOTED AGAINST PARTICIPATION) TOGETHER WITH TEACHERS AND RETAIL TRADE EMPLOYEES HAD ONLY MINIMAL TO MODERATE TURNOUT. WITH ONLY TWO EXCEPTIONS RAILROAD UNIONS IGNORED WORKSTOPPAGE. UNAFFILIATED UNIONS, SUCH AS PILOTS, AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS AND TEAMSTERS DID NOT PARTICIPATE AT ALL. THESE ABSENCES, TOGETHER WITH ONLY SPARSE PARTICIPATION IN RALLIES AND DEMONSTRATIONS, GAVE THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND MOST MEDIA THE IMPRESSION THAT DAY OF PROTEST WAS A FIZZLE. CLC'S EFFORT TO PORTRAY OCTOBER 14 AS UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS WILL NOT ALTER LAYMAN'S VIEWS AND WILL GIVE CAUSE FOR REFLECTION WITHIN LABOR MOVEMENT BEFORE ANOTHER SUCH GENERAL STRIKE IS LAUNCHED, NOTWITHSTANDING THREATS AND PRESSURES BY SUCH MILITANT LEADERS AS QUEBEC'S LABERGE, CUPE'S GRACE HARTMAN AND CLC VICE PRESIDENT SHIRLEY CARR.

3. GOC'S REACTION BEFORE AND AFTER OCTOBER 14 WAS LOW-KEY AND NON-INFLAMMATORY, INTENDED TO AVOID EXACERBATING DIFFERENCES WITH LABOR AND TO PAVE WAY FOR CONTINUING DIALOGUE ONCE DUST HAS SETTLED. ON DAY PRECEDING DAY OF PROTEST, TRUDEAU CALMED TROUBLED WATERS BY REITERATING RIGHT TO DISSENT AS FUNDAMENTAL TO DEMOCRACY. LABOR MINISTER MUNRO WENT STEP FURTHER IN EXPRESSING HOPE THAT TURNOUT (OUTSIDE WORKING HOURS) WOULD BE ADEQUATE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO MAINTAIN CLC CREDIBILITY AS REPRESENTATIVE SPOKESMAN FOR LABOR. GOC'S WARNING THAT ILLEGAL STRIKERS WOULD BE PUNISHED WAS HARDLY CHALLENGED SINCE VERY FEW OF THE HALF MILLION WORKERS FALLING UNDER CANADA LABOUR CODE OR PUBLIC SERVICE STAFF RELATIONS ACT ACTUALLY PARTICIPATED IN WORKSTOPPAGES.

4. IN AFTERMATCH OF DAY OF PROTEST, CLC CAN HAVE NO

ILLUSIONS THAT GOC WILL FEEL PERSUADED TO END CONTROLS AT A VERY EARLY DATE. NEVERTHELESS, IN VIEW OF GROWING OPPOSITION TO CONTROLS IN BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND AS APPEASING GESTURE TOWARD CLC, THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT CONCEIVABLY MODIFY THE ANTI-INFLATION PROGRAM MIGHT CONCEIVABLY MODIFY THE ANTI-INFLATION PROGRAM WHEN PROVINCIAL AGREEMENTS ARE UP FOR RENEWAL NEXT SPRING. OTHER POSSIBILITY WOULD BE AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE WITH LABOR AND BUSINESS TO INTRODUCE SOME FORM OF INCOMES POLICY ONCE INFLATION OBJECTIVES ARE REACHED.

5. WITH A RESPECTABLE 50 PERCENT TURNOUT OF MEMBERSHIP, CLC HAS PROVEN THAT IT IS THE MOST REPRESENTATIVE INTEREST GROUP AMONG WORKERS AND WOULD THEREFORE CONTEND THAT IT IS CAPABLE OF CONDUCTING MEANINGFUL CONSULTATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT ON BROAD ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES. ALTHOUGH GOC IS NOT PREPARED TO DELEGATE ITS RESPONSIBILITIES TO A STATUTORY TRI-PARTITE BODY TO PROPOSE AND CARRY OUT WIDE RANGING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICIES, AS CALLED FOR BY CLC, IT HAS BEEN CONVINCED THAT ITS CONSULTATIONS WITH BUSINESS, LABOR AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS MUST BE VASTLY IMPROVED. INDICATIVE OF THE NEED TO CHART A NEW COURSE WERE TRUDEAU'S REMARKS IN PARLIAMENT JUST PRIOR TO OCTOBER 14 EVENTS: "THE STRATEGIC AREAS UPON WHICH WE HOPE TO FOCUS" GOC'S CONSULTATION PROCESS ARE "EMPLOYMENT POLICIES, SOCIAL POLICIES, LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS, SHARING OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, DECENTRALIZATION, GROWTH AND INVESTMENT."

6. AFTER FLEXING ITS MUSCLES, CLC MIGHT JUST FIND THIS INVITATION TO ESTABLISH SUCH A DIALOGUE AS HAVING BEEN BROUGHT ABOUT IN GOOD PART BY ITS OWN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EFFORTS TO GAIN POLITICAL STATURE THROUGH DAY OF PROTEST. IF CONSERVATIVE CLC PRESIDENT MORRIS CAN PREVAIL OVER THE MORE MILITANT ELEMENTS WHO OPPOSE A LESS ANTAGONISTIC RELATIONSHIP TOWARD ANY PARTY OTHER THAN NDP, THEN A WATERSHED IN LABOR-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS WILL HAVE INDEED BEEN REACHED.
ENDERS

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